

# LEARNING – THE FOUNDATION FOR AGILITY AND SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE

“The ability for organisations – and the people who work in them – to learn fast, adapt and manage change, has never been more important for organisational survival. Learning is a key strategic lever that organisations can use to maintain a leading market position. Learning should be high up the business agenda, but too often, learning professionals lack credibility and influence as business leaders. The Learning function needs to build its influence as an agent of change and performance improvement, leading the agenda in terms of how learning can enable organisation growth.”

Gillian Pillans, Report Author

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# 02

## KEY TRENDS IN THE LEARNING MARKET

This chapter tracks current developments and trends in the learning market, and how these are playing out in organisations. We examine trends such as virtual and mobile learning – including their potential and pitfalls.

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In chapter 1, we considered the implications of the current business context for learning. Here, we examine the current state of learning in organisations, both with reference to the results of the CRF survey conducted as part of the research, and by synthesising interviews conducted for the research. We drill down further into some of the macro trends highlighted in chapter 1.

## 2.1

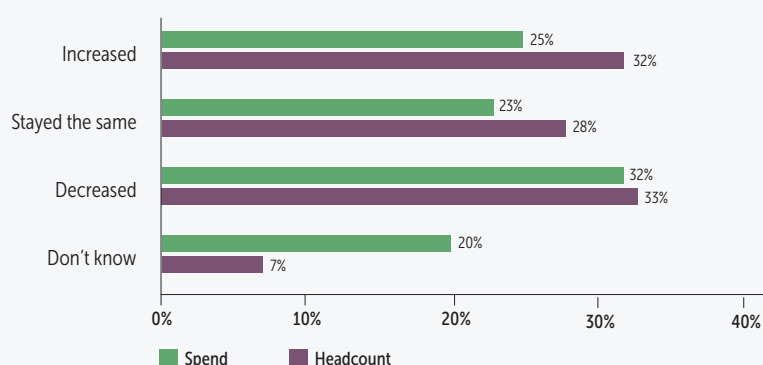
### CRF SURVEY RESULTS

In summary, we find that innovations within the learning market, such as performance support systems that sit alongside people as they do their day-to-day jobs, are found mainly in the individual/productive corner of the CRF Learning Matrix discussed in chapter 1. For example, Amazon uses performance support and robotics to make its seasonal warehouse workers productive within two days of starting – this compares with two weeks in traditional warehouse jobs. But while such technologies may be making learning available to a wider audience and closer to the point of need, they are predominantly ‘technical’ solutions. They mostly help individuals do their current jobs more productively. They are not so helpful when it comes to developing ‘adaptive’ solutions to problems we may not yet be aware of – complex business problems that require organisations to bring people together to imagine new solutions and deploy collective critical thinking to work out what needs to be done. In short, they are tools for productive, not generative learning.

Had we produced this report in 2010, we might have expected learning budgets to be under pressure due to the recession following the 2008 financial crisis. Seven years on, we see a different picture. KPMG partner Mark Williamson has found that demand for learning within organisations is higher than it was five years ago, driven by investment in organisation and workforce transformation and a drive to improve productivity. Our survey results show the following trends.

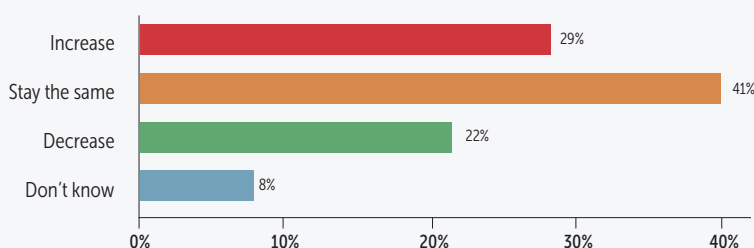
- Over the past three years, one-third of respondents (32%) have seen a decrease in learning budgets, 23% have seen budgets unchanged, and one-quarter (25%) have seen an increase.
- Learning headcount has increased at a slightly higher rate than budgets (33% of respondents report an increase), suggesting that learning activities are being brought back in house. Indeed, 15% of those respondents who outsource learning activities report that they are outsourcing less than they used to.
- Overall, respondents predict that learning budgets will remain stable or grow ‘somewhat’. Less than one-quarter (22%) expect their learning budget to fall over the next three years, 41% expect it to remain stable, and 29% anticipate it will grow.
- However, organisations face the perennial problem of knowing exactly how much they spend on learning. Only 61% of respondents to our survey consider their organisation has a clear view of its annual spend on learning, and nearly half (46%) don’t know how much their organisation spends per employee per year.

**Figure 3: Trends in spending and headcount**



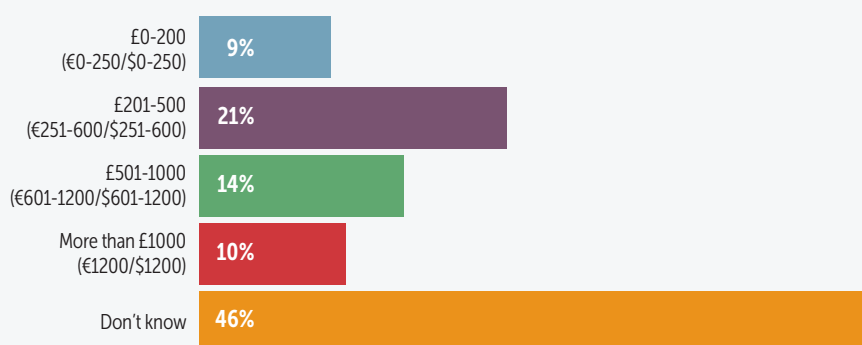
Source: CRF Member Survey

**Figure 4: Future spending on learning. How do you expect your budget to change over the next three years?**



Source: CRF Member Survey

**Figure 5: Current spend per employee per year**



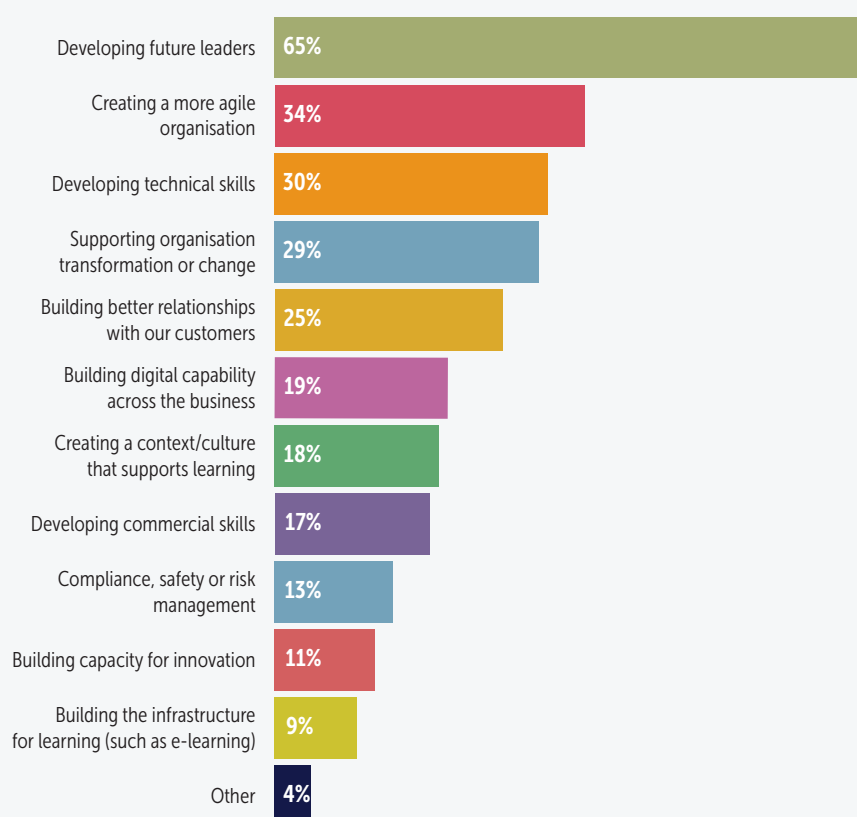
Source: CRF Member Survey

Respondents described the business factors that are driving the budget for learning. Text analysis shows the following, in descending order of priority.

- Increased business demands for learning, in particular to support business growth.
- The need to reduce cost or increase efficiency.
- Supporting organisation transformation, in particular digital business transformation.
- Investment in learning technology.
- Focus on compliance, conduct and regulatory requirements.
- Investing in leadership skills.
- Investing in technical skills and apprenticeships.
- Reorganisation of the Learning function.
- Investing in learning as a means of retaining key talent.

We asked CRF members to outline their current top three priorities for learning. The responses focus on developing future leaders, supporting organisational change and developing technical and digital skills. However, it is concerning that lower priority is given to building the types of commercial and customer-oriented capabilities needed to remain competitive: only 17% see developing commercial skills as a top-three priority for learning, and just one-quarter (25%) cite building better relationships with customers. And although many organisations say they want to improve innovation, only 11% of our sample see this as one of their top three learning priorities. It is interesting that while support for business growth is a key budget driver, investment in the commercial, customer and innovation skills that might drive that growth are seen as lower priority.

**Figure 6: What are the main priorities for learning in your organisation?**



Source: CRF Member Survey

- Innovation in the design and delivery of learning and better use of technology.
- Using more multi-modal approaches to learning, for example blended learning, coaching, action learning etc.
- Quality of leadership and coaching skills programmes.
- Technical skills development and compliance training.

No one said they were doing well at helping their business work out its future strategy, develop the capabilities that will be required to deliver on that strategy, or build capacity for innovation. These are essential for future growth and have a substantial learning component, so we would expect these to be top priority for the Learning function.

When asked what aspects of their organisation's approach to learning respondents would most like to improve, the following themes emerged – in descending order of priority.

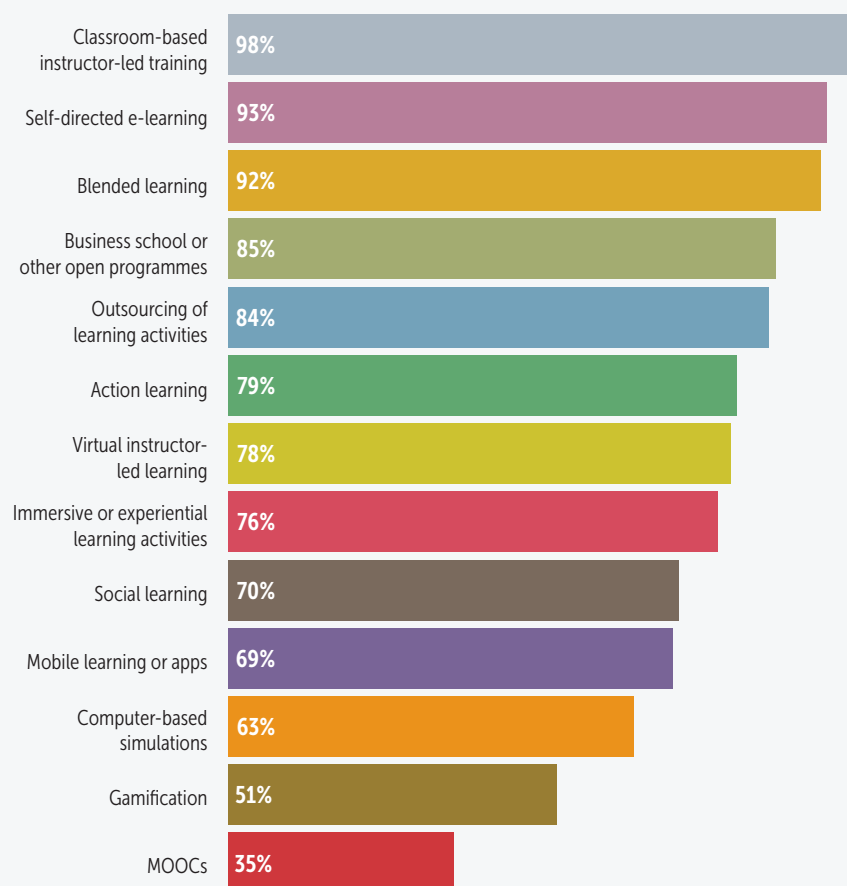
- Improvements to technology – especially Learning Management Systems, but also greater use of digital learning tools, performance support etc. and offering a better range of learning channels.
- Better evaluation of the impact of learning and obtaining good quality feedback from the business.
- Closer alignment between what the business needs and what learning delivers.
- Moving from a 'push' to a 'pull' learning strategy – so that individuals are in charge of what they learn and have the resources to learn what they need, where and when they need it.

When asked to describe what their organisation does well from a learning perspective, the following themes emerged – again in descending order of priority.

- Providing a wide range of quality solutions, sometimes on a very small budget.
- Use of technology has made learning accessible to a broader range of employees.
- Engaging the business and building commitment to learning within the business, both among learners and through senior management sponsorship (including financial commitments).
- Connecting learning and business strategy and responding to business needs.

- Engaging line managers to support their people's learning.
- A desire to change attitudes in the business, breaking out of a 'courses first' mindset, viewing learning as necessary for business success, not a luxury, and creating more of a learning culture.
- Improving communication with the business, and being able to respond in a more agile way to business needs.
- Improving the quality of resources (for example making e-learning more stimulating).
- Some learning teams deliver little learning beyond basic compliance requirements.
- Translating what people learn into improved performance on the job.
- Improving the structure and governance of the Learning function.
- Improving efficiency, delivering quality services to a tight budget, and doing more with less.
- Some felt the push towards technology-driven learning has gone too far, and that it is important to think more carefully about the most suitable solution for a particular learning need.
- Building the capability of learning professionals, getting them out of an old-school mindset of instructor-led training.
- A desire to move towards team-based learning.

**Figure 7: Current use of different learning methods**

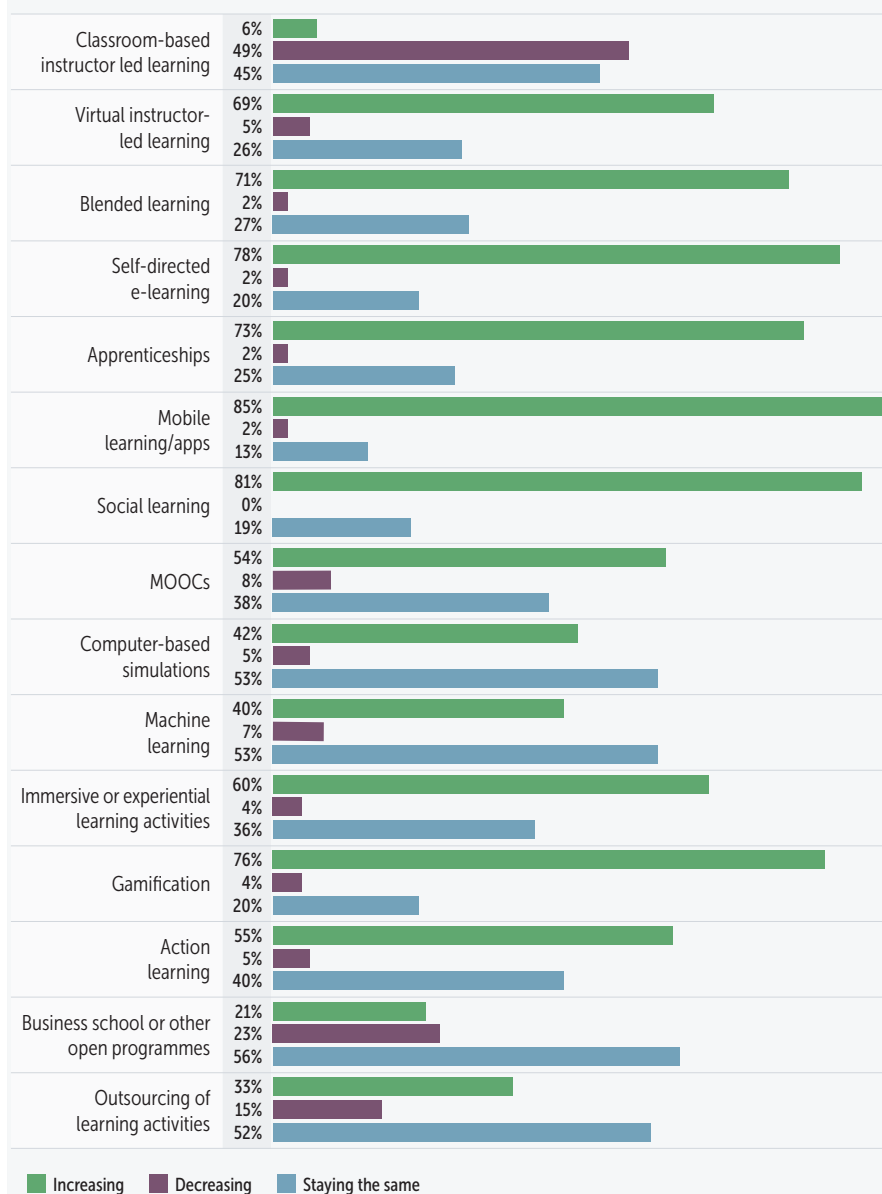


Source: CRF Member Survey

**“TEACHERS SHOULD BE REPLACED WITH FACILITATORS, WHO CAN HELP DELEGATES TO CONSTRUCT THEIR OWN UNDERSTANDING OR ABILITY TO PERFORM A SKILL OR BEHAVIOUR. IT’S NOT ENOUGH FOR FACILITATORS TO SIMPLY TELL PEOPLE ABOUT A CONCEPT, SKILL OR BEHAVIOUR; PEOPLE NEED THE OPPORTUNITY TO DIRECTLY EXPERIENCE EACH OF THESE IF THEY ARE TO SHIFT THEIR BEHAVIOUR.”**

Alison Maitland, Head of Product, Lane4

**Figure 8: Is your current use of the following learning methods increasing, staying the same or decreasing?**



Source: CRF Member Survey

#### *Trends in use of different learning methods*

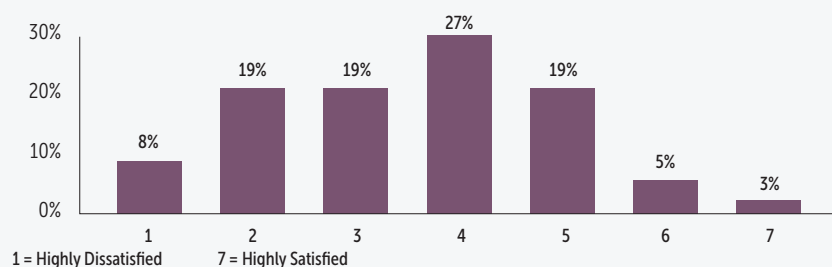
- We see that the most widely-used learning method is still classroom-based instructor-led programmes. However, this is also falling significantly, with nearly half (48%) of respondents reducing their use of the traditional classroom.
- The only other learning methods where we see a decrease in use are business school or other open programmes (24% are reducing usage), and outsourcing (15% are reducing their reliance on outsourcing).
- The greatest increases are in mobile learning, social learning, and self-directed e-learning.
- Some emerging learning methods such as gamification are increasing, but not yet particularly significant.
- It is interesting to see that the take up of Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) remains low compared to other methods. This perhaps reflects the fact that participants often don't complete the course (some estimates put completion at just 8%).

Our survey showed a reasonably positive view of learning technology – despite the many frustrations our interviewees voiced about Learning Management Systems (LMSs). Just under half (45%) of respondents are satisfied with their learning technology, 28% are neutral and 27% are dissatisfied.

## “THE WORLD OF COURSES, COMPETENCIES AND CERTIFICATION IS RAPIDLY EVAPORATING – REPLACED BY A NEW ECOSYSTEM OF RESOURCES, GUIDANCE AND RATINGS.”

Nick Shackleton-Jones, Director, Learning and Performance Innovation, PA Consulting

Figure 9: How satisfied are you with your current learning technology?



Source: CRF Member Survey

### TESCO'S CULTURAL SHIFT

One of the trends we observed is a move by many organisations from large-scale flagship learning programmes towards encouraging individuals to take responsibility for their own development, often in collaboration with others through social learning. For example, Tesco's philosophy has shifted. "We are looking to drive accountability by creating networks of learners and teachers across the organisation," said Louise Cavanagh, UK Academy Manager. This includes encouraging better 'learning' conversations between managers and colleagues, and educating colleagues about how to be a better learner. Tesco Academy is promoting a 'Try-learn-teach' model – educating people about learning choices and encouraging them to take responsibility for their own development. Where people are brought together, there are two principal differences compared to the way things used to work. First, the timing is different – people get support when they need it. "Colleagues used to attend programmes before they were promoted or moved roles; now we catch them after they move – at the point of need." Second, the focus has shifted from 'teaching' towards building networks, collaboration and developing skills together with others going through the same experience. "We do bring people together, but now the way we design and run programmes is much more collaborative, getting people to work together on common issues and challenges," said Cavanagh.

## 2.2

### THE RISE OF THE 'CURATED' LEARNING PLATFORM

One of the biggest changes we have seen in recent years is the emergence of learning technology platforms that give learners direct access to learning resources, at their own instigation, without having to go through the Learning function. This began with e-learning, which in its early days was clunky and not very user-friendly. Systems are now more sophisticated,

combining content seamlessly from a variety of sources and incorporating text, video and games, and offering social media functionality. Usage is increasing accordingly. A survey by Degreed – a learning platform provider – found that 70% of respondents take live, virtual or e-learning courses provided by their employer at least once a year, and, on average, once

every three or four months. Instructor-delivered classroom learning is still important (a recent survey by the Association for Talent Development estimated that 55% of formal learning hours are still led by an instructor in a classroom), but the trend towards online learning is unstoppable.



At the same time, employees' expectations are changing. "It used to be that learning was driven by the needs of the organisation. Now we need to pay attention to the ways in which employees want to consume learning, and start there whenever we're designing a solution," said Savvas Koufou, Head of UK People and Change Banking at KPMG in the UK.

There are a number of associated trends.

- Virtual learning technology enables learners to come together online in cohorts, to engage with instructors and with each other, and to take part in coaching, exercises or action learning. For global companies, the removal of travel costs makes the substantial investment required to build a high-quality virtual learning environment worthwhile.
- Mobile. Many organisations have developed apps in response to demand from employees to access learning content while out of the office. While the majority of e-learning is still done via PCs, mobile is increasing. Degreed has found that 77% of workers do at least some of their learning on a smartphone or tablet: 17% of the time people spend learning on digital devices is spent on smartphones, and 13% on tablets. Being able to learn 'on the move' means they can utilise time while commuting or at home rather than having to take time out to learn when they're in the office.
- Online social learning appears to be an unstoppable trend. This involves people learning together outside of the formal organisation structure through dialogue and discussion, online and sometimes face-to-face. Usually topics and content will be curated by the organisation.

## VIRTUAL VERSUS FACE-TO-FACE LEARNING – WHAT ARE WE LEARNING?

Organisations that have been delivering learning virtually for some time are now starting to understand what works well and in what circumstances. Here are some observations from our research.

BP has moved a substantial proportion of programmes delivered by its learning academies into a virtual environment. Key lessons include the following.

- You can't simply convert a multi-day face-to-face programme into a virtual copy. You have to completely redesign it so it can be delivered in a modular way.
- You may encounter resistance from both Learning professionals and learners themselves, and will have to re-educate them. Learning facilitators and designers also need re-skilling to work in the virtual environment. BP is finding that learner Net Promoter Scores are gradually increasing, indicating that people are getting used to learning in this environment.
- There are limitations to what the technology can do – particularly where participants have limited broadband access. Contingency planning is necessary.
- While some things can be delivered just as effectively virtually, others – networking, sense making and skills practice, for example – just can't. What virtual learning does tend to miss is the informal learning that happens in breaks and discussions – and it's hard to design for that.
- The types of content best suited to virtual delivery are those that teach a discrete technical skill. A design with short episodic inputs separated by time for practice, before reconvening to discuss learning and get input from peers and teachers, has worked well.

Kim Lafferty, VP Global Leadership Development at GSK, has run a number of experiments comparing virtual and face-to-face programmes and trialling social learning. She recently trialled a new first-line leader programme: some cohorts engaged in online peer-to-peer learning before a face-to-face module, while others didn't engage with each other before they met. She found that those who took part in online peer-to-peer learning before the event experienced accelerated learning at the event itself. She also compared groups who went through structured online peer-to-peer learning exercises against groups who had met online before the event, but in a less structured way, and found that the former experienced more accelerated learning. "My assumption was that this wouldn't work," said Lafferty. "People would be too busy. But I was surprised. The quality of virtual conversations was good, and it meant people could start the two-day face-to-face module higher up the learning curve than if they hadn't gone through the online experience. We also learned you can't just bring people together online and leave them to have a nice conversation. You have to provide learning content and skill building from the very first interaction."

Lafferty cautions that, before you move all programmes online, you need to decide what you are trying to achieve. For GSK, having mixed cohorts learn together virtually, works well. However, for programmes where building a network and learning together is a core part of the experience – those aimed at graduates, MBAs and enterprise leaders, for example – the company has had to retain a higher degree of face-to-face interaction.

Lee Waller, Director of Research at Hult International Business School, recently completed a study comparing the effectiveness of different modes of learning delivery (see References). Participants attended either a fully face-to-face programme, a fully virtual programme, or a blended programme (with online pre-work, a face-to-face simulation, and online debrief and feedback), all designed to develop the same competences. Waller and colleagues hypothesised that the virtual programme would have less impact on learning, but the results showed it was just as effective as face-to-face or blended delivery. Waller thinks what made the virtual programme effective was its live, synchronous, experiential and highly participative nature, along with the opportunities presented for feedback from facilitators. What appeared to be important was not the face-to-face or virtual environment, but the quality of the methodology and the opportunities it presented for participant interaction, practice and feedback.

- An ecosystem of apps. Whereas organisations used to have a single LMS that drove everything, they are now looking to plug in a variety of different best-of-breed technologies, deploy them for as long as they are useful, and then discard them when they have outlived their usefulness. A key requirement is that users need to be able to 'plug and play' the different elements of the ecosystem, which have to be capable of talking to each other. The 'EdTech' market has led to an explosion of start-ups in the learning field, and many large organisations are more open to trying out emerging technologies.

The trends identified here are having a significant impact on the corporate learning landscape.

- It's increasingly in the hands of the learner to decide what, where and when to learn. It's harder for the Learning function to keep track of what's being consumed outside of the LMS. Sometimes managers experience a bigger cultural shift than employees. "Managers can find it hard to move to a model where employees are essentially in the driving seat, they can dip in and out during the course of the working day, and can choose what to consume and when, without requiring any approval from their line manager," said Riet Grond, Global Head of Learning at Novartis.
- The resources learners use aren't necessarily the ones the Learning function provides. A survey by Degreed found that 85% of respondents learn things for work by searching online at least once a week. Employees spend on average five times more time learning on their own than using their employers'

learning resources. When they need to learn something new for work, their first port of call is either their manager (69%) or colleagues (55%), followed by searching the internet (47%). Only 28% would turn first to their employer's LMS and just 21% would speak to L&D or HR. Degreed also found that three-quarters of people invested their own money (an average of \$339 each) in career-related learning last year.

**Figure 10: Self-service learning**



**85%**

learn by  
searching online



**70%**

learn from peers,  
articles or blogs



**53%**

learn from  
videos

Source: Degreed, 2016

- The role of the Learning function is shifting from designing and delivering learning to selecting and managing learning platforms, curating content, and managing a collection of tools and content suppliers. Learning professionals need to know how to source the best content, whether

that be bespoke internally-developed learning resources, such as exercises, quizzes and videos, or external sources such as TED talks. Nigel Paine suggests that, increasingly, creating bespoke content should be a last resort, advising: "Only create when you cannot curate."

- Learners who are distracted or try to multitask are less likely to remember what they learn, so learning designers need to build expertise in how to keep learners engaged when they are interacting in a virtual rather than physical classroom. Good learning design involves the following.
  - Being clear about the learning objectives, and how the learning will address them.
  - Making sure the content and exercises are highly relevant to the learner's job, so they see the point.
  - Choosing the right channel – video or podcast for example.
  - Ensuring that the content is optimised for that channel. For example, many e-learning programmes make the mistake of simply transferring a PowerPoint slide deck onto video, without thinking about how to bring the content to life.
  - Building learning communities. Nigel Paine said: "You have to move away from only being concerned with putting content online, to using the digital experience to build a strong sense of community."

- Learning resources are in 'constant beta'. In a dynamic organisational context, learning is highly time-sensitive. Learning content has to be developed fast and kept up-to-date. Increasingly, organisations are adopting design thinking or Agile development techniques in order to rapidly develop and deploy learning solutions. Learning products are never seen as 'complete' – they are continually adapted to learners' changing needs, often through co-creation with them. They are also often co-created with users. Nigel Paine said: "The real opportunity lies in bringing learning closer to the workflow, instantly accommodating the needs of the learner, merging learning into a performance support and troubleshooting process that the learner can access in the moment of need."
- Traditional centralised LMSs are no longer fit-for-purpose in a network-driven learning environment with a strong social element. They have become too expensive and unwieldy for organisations that are looking to run in a more agile, distributed way. "Many LMSs were designed for a top-down, command-and-control style of learning, which is not how learning works today. Now, they've become essentially a glorified admin system," said Simon Gibson, Head of Talent & Organisation Development, Sonnedix.

## CASE NOTES – TAKING AN AGILE APPROACH TO LEARNING AT SKY

Sky's UK Learning team, led by Tracey Waters, has radically changed the way it develops learning products. Waters said: "The way we historically developed learning products was out of sync with the needs of the business and the pace of change. Sky has adopted 'Agile' and 'Scrum' methods for technology development – what would stop us doing the same for learning?"

The start point was to look at customer needs. Waters said: "We asked why people would 'buy' from us as an internal Learning function. What did our customers want? What would make them a repeat customer? If we were an external supplier, would we act differently?"

Waters decided to trial Agile development processes as a way of changing the mindset of the Learning team. She and her team ran an experiment for 90 days: the team would run using Agile processes for this time to determine what difference that made to their performance. In practice this meant a number of things.

- The team segmented its internal customers into discrete groups with clearly defined needs. They identified critical points of need for each, such as a manager having to hire someone for the first time.
- The team came up with a list of priority products to be developed. They then developed each as a prototype through a series of time-bound 'sprints', each of which had a goal of producing a piece of work that was ready to go live within a couple of weeks.
- The learning was designed to address the real concerns and motivations of the people who took part. Waters said that her team responded to customer demand by delivering short, intense, face-to-face sessions on targeted issues. "Our customers told us that they wanted face-to-face interactions around subjects of immediate concern to them, so just pushing content online was not going to deliver what was needed," she said. Participants were away from their job for as little time as possible.
- The Learning team used real-time information from the HR system to identify people to invite to specific learning events. For example, the team can see when someone starts managing direct reports. Using automated email, the team sends highly targeted information about transition support. This is a combination of Sky-specific digital learning resources and intense mini-workshops with other first-time managers. The design allows resources to be focused at the point of need, and the Agile approach allows iterative testing of solutions with 'customers'.
- In one example, when a restructuring was announced, Waters' team was able to quickly refocus on supporting people through the transition. They built 90-minute workshops that managers could attend in groups in the week before they were due to have difficult conversations with people.
- Waters is now able to deploy her team of ten more flexibly. Previously, people were dedicated to specific learning areas such as leadership development. Now, teams are built based on the needs of the particular product being designed and the team can be redeployed to different learning products, as needs shift.

## CASE NOTES – DIGITAL LEARNING AT IMD

Traditionally, attending a business school programme has been about leaving the workplace for an intense experience, engaging with faculty and other participants on campus. However, the demands of business school clients are shifting. Budgets are under pressure, and people are learning differently as demand for online and blended programmes increases.

Business schools are responding to changing market demand by developing their own blended and virtual programmes. IMD is offering a greater range of blended learning options in its programmes, and has also developed a set of digital open programmes – Global Leadership in the Cloud – which covers a range of topics including innovation, leadership, finance, marketing and strategy.

The design of the virtual programmes is different from a typical week-long campus programme.

- Participants work together as a cohort over eight weeks.
- Each week, participants access content via highly engaging videos presented by IMD faculty.
- Participants work in virtual teams of four or five people to discuss and apply the concepts. They also work together in pairs building important 'horizontal bonds' via disclosure, enabling them to share experiences and learning, and discuss obstacles and derailers, openly and effectively.
- Participants work with a coach to help them apply what they are learning to live issues they are working on in their organisation. This allows them to embed the learning immediately and minimises the 'transfer gap'. Participants use feedback and discussions with their coach to further refine and practise what they are learning, and coaches support them in a weekly action learning process. Paul Hunter, who's responsible for Digital Learning at IMD, said: "Our digital learning platforms are carefully designed to ensure not only knowledge dissemination but more importantly learning application. The mix and range of input challenges participants and enables them to move beyond knowledge acquisition. Live exercises embedded in their professional context ensure that learners see for themselves, on a weekly basis, the relevance and impact of what they have learned. The feedback loop from their personal coach helps them further evaluate the effectiveness of their actions and modify for the week ahead."
- Completion rate is high – 92% of participants complete their programmes.

Hunter set out some of the insights IMD has gained through rolling out virtual learning.

- Content input has to be short, compelling and use a range of stimulating pedagogic devices to maintain the learner's attention. Participants retain less information when they multitask. Hunter said: "The biggest competitor for digital learning is email. If the content is not sufficiently immersive and engaging, participants run the risk of playing a video on a second screen while they get on with 'real work'. If participants aren't focused, they are unlikely to retain knowledge and will certainly not apply their learning."
- Designed in the right way, digital programmes allow learning to be embedded in day-to-day work. A typical business school programme involves the participants being away from the office for an extended period, often in a different country. Hunter said that learning application has surpassed expectations, not only because participants practise applying what they are learning 'in situ' but also due to a deep relationship with their coach which extends over an 8-week period.
- Virtual learning addresses different learning objectives from face-to-face learning. Trying to 'translate' a face-to-face experience into the virtual arena is doomed to fail. It's essential that learning providers build the digital learning journey from scratch, deploying appropriate learning techniques for different distribution channels. Any digital programme worth its salt will apply backwards design: start with the learning objectives; define how you will measure them and only then start to create the content.

**“IF YOU CAN PUSH EXPLICIT KNOWLEDGE AROUND HOW TO EXECUTE A TASK CLOSE TO WHERE THAT TASK IS PERFORMED, THAT RESOURCE WILL BE MUCH MORE READILY USED AND APPLIED. PEOPLE ARE MOTIVATED TO USE IT BECAUSE IT HELPS THEM DO THEIR JOB BETTER AND MORE EASILY.”**

Tony O'Driscoll, Global Head of Strategic Leadership Solutions, Duke CE

## 2.3

### PERFORMANCE SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Traditionally, e-learning has amounted to repackaging knowledge that would otherwise be shared in a face-to-face setting, and delivering it online. But this still leaves the problem of learning transfer – learners retain and apply only a fraction (some studies suggest 15%) of what they learn. As we discuss further in chapter 5, adults learn best when what they learn is highly relevant and immediately applicable to their job. Tony O'Driscoll said: “People think in tasks, but education deals in topics. The way we design instruction is not organised the way people execute. Sometimes people need instructions, not instruction.”

This insight has led many organisations to build performance support systems – learning resources that are accessible and applicable at the point of need. Performance support sits somewhere between an external search engine and the internal LMS. It holds a knowledge base that's unique to the organisation, and it provides instructions to help people to perform job-related tasks more effectively. For example, a sales executive might access the system on a smartphone to watch a video giving instructions on how to set up a new customer on the CRM system. Nick Shackleton-Jones, Director, Learning and Performance Innovation at PA Consulting, compares such tools to in-car satnav. “It crystallises decades of accumulated wisdom, delivered in the form of simple guidance, at the point of need,” he said. (See the Case Notes opposite).

O'Driscoll advises looking for teams or individuals who significantly outperform their peers, and find out what they do differently from everyone else. You can

then share what constitutes exemplary performance more broadly. BP and others have also used this method to capture the knowledge of deep technical experts in order to share best practice and support the development of less experienced employees.

The new frontier for performance support is likely to be artificial intelligence (AI). For example, it's becoming more and more difficult for doctors to keep up to date

with medical advances. The volume of research that's published globally every year would be more than any individual doctor could possibly read. IBM's Watson is developing applications that sit alongside doctors so they have all the latest medical information from across the globe at their fingertips when they are dealing with patients. This technology is likely to appear in many different applications over the next few years.

#### CASE NOTES – BP

Over the past few years, BP has built a number of performance support portals. They are designed to shorten the time it takes specific employee groups to become competent by providing the resources they need, when they need them, to become productive. Although the portals are learning resources and they are owned by the digital learning team, the start point was less about knowledge transfer than about making the organisation more usable for people who work there.

The company identified a number of key populations whose performance would improve if they had the resources to help them overcome typical blockers to productivity. Examples include induction for new joiners and resources for graduates. Some disciplines have their own sites – for example, the company's 100 asset economists have their own portal which maps out the first 100 days for someone joining that team.

Ameet Thakkar, who runs the digital learning team, said: “We started by identifying problems people faced in these transitions and the things that they typically found hard to do. We asked people what had helped them get up to speed and what they actually use, and we brought together all the useful stuff into one place.”

The solution had to have a strong design element, compelling user experience, and be easy to use at key points of need. Typical content includes short videos delivered by subject matter experts, checklists, guides and infographics. Thakkar said: “It has to have both high form and function, because that's what people are used to at home. It also has to work well on mobile, be easy to navigate and highly searchable.”

Both the design and the development process were heavily user centric. For example, a user advisory group assisted the learning team through the whole development cycle (not just at the design stage), providing direction on what would and wouldn't work. This attention to detail has paid off: for example, the new starter site became one of the most heavily used sites on the internal network anywhere in the organisation.

A key point to note is that, although the portals are open to anyone within the organisation, they are not open for anyone to publish. Thakkar said: “The biggest risk to the portals' success was content-dumping.” The digital learning team works with the main stakeholders for each portal to determine what should and shouldn't go on each portal, in order to maintain quality and relevance. However, employees can share material with each other via other internal social media such as Yammer and SharePoint.

## **“SOCIAL LEARNING REQUIRES A COMPLETELY DIFFERENT MINDSET FOR THE LEARNING FUNCTION – YOU HAVE TO LET GO OF CONTROL.”**

Simon Gibson, Head of Talent and Organisation Development, Sonnedix

### **2.4** **SOCIAL LEARNING**

In many ways, learning is – and always has been – a social process. The difference we see today is a collision between learning from others and social media. Most modern learning platforms now have a social media element, which allows people to comment, share and ‘like’ content. Increasingly, social learning is becoming a preferred way for organisations to deliver learning, build communities of learners who can support each other and provide advice and input on a just-in-time basis, or work together in cohorts in a more structured fashion. For example, at Thomson Reuters, a critical mass of leaders has developed the habit of regularly using the social learning platform to share insights, and this is encouraging people to get involved. For instance, the President of one business unit wrote a blog after returning from holiday about what he had read while he was away and what he had learned. He asked others to share what they had learned from their holiday readings and this got a conversation started.

Social learning is clearly a major development in the learning market, but there are two major concerns.

1. When people can generate their own content, it’s hard to maintain consistent quality. Like an herbaceous shrub in early summer, without substantial pruning the volume of content can spread and quickly become unmanageable. Organisations have a choice. Do they make their social learning platform open to anyone to post or share

content? Do they rely on the number of ‘likes’, ‘shares’ and hits to indicate its usefulness? Or do they maintain tight quality control by appointing subject matter experts (SMEs) who are accountable for keeping the content up to date and high quality?

The extent to which organisations maintain control over the content seems to depend on factors including the nature of the industry, the culture of the organisation, and the reason for creating the platform in the first place. For example, in safety critical industries such as energy, content that’s published to the system has to go through a gatekeeper who’s responsible for commissioning and verifying it. In retail, Tesco has piloted Workplace (like Facebook at work) but has not tried to manage the content that’s published. Louise Cavanagh, UK Academy Manager, said: “Tesco continues to make use of online social platforms for sharing information amongst colleagues and enabling them to connect. As with most large organisations, we are clear with colleagues on their responsibility when it comes to posting and sharing on social media. The challenge we face when shifting the way in which we learn is how much of our content is managed centrally vs learner generated through online forums and sharing.” Sometimes you see more than one policy in operation in the same organisation. For example, you might have tight controls in the regulated parts of a bank, but allow the digital development team to manage its own content. The principle

of ‘test and learn’ can apply here. For instance, BT recently created a new position – the Content Curation Lead – to take responsibility for the content on its Academy platform. The proliferation of content had become overwhelming, so the company needed to develop a more hands-on content management strategy to allow people to find the most useful and relevant content easily.

2. The second, and more fundamental, concern about social learning is whether it leads to real, sustained behaviour change. Alison Maitland, Head of Product at management consultancy Lane4, said: “We see a lot of interest around social learning, but behaviour change requires people to commit to ongoing practice. It can be easy to feel you’ve ticked a box, but changing behaviour requires much deeper engagement. The learning has to have a clear purpose, and has to connect back to the individual learner’s motivation and context.”

There are examples of social learning platforms being used as a tool for ‘generative’ learning – where people across the organisation co-create ideas and solutions. For example, IBM has run ‘jams’ involving tens of thousands of employees who come together in online forums to develop new ideas for innovations or discover ways of bringing new technologies to market. Over the course of three days, participants are invited to submit and refine ideas on the subject of the ‘jam’, and the best go forward to be commercialised.



**“ONE OF THE CHALLENGES IS THE CULTURE WITHIN THE LEARNING FUNCTION NEEDS TO SHIFT. WE NEED TO STOP KIDDING OURSELVES THAT WE ACTUALLY HAVE TOTAL CONTROL OVER LEARNING CONTENT. AND IN SEEKING TO MAINTAIN CONTROL, WE CAN END UP ACTING AS A BRAKE ON LEARNING, NOT AN ENABLER. WE NEED TO LET GO OF THE NOTION THAT ONLY LEARNING PEOPLE CAN CREATE AND CONTROL THE QUALITY OF LEARNING CONTENT.”**

Nicola Braden, Learning Innovation and Standards Director, Unilever

## CASE NOTES – ONLINE SOCIAL LEARNING AT ASTRAZENECA

AstraZeneca has recently rolled out a learning programme for front-line leaders that's delivered via online social learning. According to Rosie Mackenzie, Global Head of Leader & Enterprise Development: “We had to build something that could be rolled out in a consistent way globally, and fast. We were also conscious that people have little time to spend on learning – so whatever we did had to be highly relevant and applicable to their role.”

The programme runs as follows.

- Participants take part in cohorts of 100 to 150.
- The programme involves six modules over six months. Participants have a month to complete each module.
- Participants access video and other content, and engage in online discussions with other members of their cohort. They can share their own content, such as videos. There are some face-to-face sessions, which allow for a deeper dive. For example, some leaders have chosen to use the content of individual modules as the basis for more in-depth discussions on specific topics. Participants in some non-English speaking countries have followed up the English-language programme with sessions in their own language to reflect on and cement their learning. There are also live Skype sessions with senior leaders in the company. There's a gamification element too, and the person who's top of the leader-board for each cohort is awarded a prize.
- At the beginning of the programme participants have a session that advises them on how to make the most of social learning.
- The learning design leaves it to users to decide the most suitable route through the content for them. The programme was designed with the end user in mind. “We built a profile of the typical user of this learning – we named her Olga, to make her come to life. We focused on the predicaments Olga typically faces, and designed the solution to help her,” said Mackenzie.
- The programme was designed and built in three months. By the end of 2017, 30 cohorts covering 6,000 employees and 12 languages will have completed it.

## 2.5 GAMIFICATION

Gamification has generated a lot of interest in the learning field over recent years, although this is not a new technology – think flight simulators for pilots. The underpinning idea is that turning learning into a game creates an engaging, immersive experience that makes it easy for people to try out different strategies, learn new skills, learn from mistakes and test their learning. You can incentivise positive behaviours by immediately recognising learning and progress. The reality of gamification is generally more prosaic, however. The principal focus today tends to be on winning badges and publishing leader-boards, which

encourages individual users to compete with each other. Sophisticated games are very expensive to develop, and are beyond the budgets of all but the most deep-pocketed organisations.

However, organisations can use simple games to test and measure whether learning has enhanced knowledge and skills, and to personalise learning. “This can more precisely identify where learning has not been effective and allow targeted interventions to take place, pinpointing specific areas where the individual needs further support,” said KPMG's Mark Williamson.

## GAMIFICATION IN LEARNING

Policy training is a regulatory requirement for insurance companies, but it is generally unengaging and unpopular with staff. Direct Line Group now takes a more gamified approach to delivering policy learning. Instead of reading pages of dry text and completing a test, staff go through a series of scenarios. Learners earn badges for completing tasks and show what they have learned as they progress through, rather than having to complete a test at the end. The learning also takes less time to complete than traditional policy learning.

Steve Mahaley, Digital Learning Strategist at Duke CE, has used commercially available games as a way of teaching leadership skills such as strategy development and execution and collaboration. “They can be a great way of personalising the learning process so each person has a unique journey through the content based on their individual needs and motivations, or for taking people through a series of different decisions that push towards particular learning outcomes.” For example, he has used the fantasy game ‘Age of Empires’ to teach strategic thinking and collaboration. He also built a virtual 3D world in Second Life for a telecommunications company. This acted as a virtual meeting space for action learning teams, but it also helped participants work out how it feels to engage with technologies that are likely to disrupt their business, and figure out the implications for the business.

Tony O'Driscoll says that the learning experience within the game needs to be engineered so that 'teachable moments' arise at every turn. Effective gamified learning experiences tend to share the following features.

- Instructionally grounded: the narrative and mechanics of the game must serve the content that's being taught, not the other way around.
- Participant centred: they need to create an immersive context that puts the learner in control.
- Contextually situated: the environment needs to be believable and action-oriented.
- Inquisitively discovered: the content has to spark the learner's curiosity, and engage them in the content as they progress.
- Action-oriented: the teachable moments that arise need to be meaningful and relevant.
- Consequentially experienced: the design needs to reflect the idea that learning comes from trial and error, and is an iterative process.
- Collaboratively motivated: learners derive greater meaning and insight from shared experience, so gamification should focus on peer-based learning.
- Reflectively synthesised: self- and group-based reflection should be an integral element of the design.

However, gamification risks becoming a fad. Derek Hann, Chief Learning Officer at PayPal, said: "Gamification does drive learner behaviour through a natural sense of competitiveness. However, it doesn't necessarily allow you to learn things you couldn't do through other learning modalities that are already available to you."

## 2.6

### VIRTUAL REALITY AND ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Virtual reality (VR) is an emerging technology that's generating a lot of excitement because of its potential to transform the learner experience. It's in its infancy and its use is limited by technical and cost constraints, but the visual and immersive aspects lend themselves to some unique applications.

Because it is highly immersive VR can sometimes be a disorientating experience. You can be instantly transported to what feels like a completely different place, and because the brain thinks it's in a real environment, it creates a visceral reaction in the rest of the body. For example, you can experience vertigo when you look over a cliff edge, or smile back at a child who's smiling at you; some people even think they can smell the place they're viewing through the headset. Although people can go and look where they like in the VR world and experience it based on what they are interested in, for the time being it's only possible to deliver a VR experience that's been pre-recorded with special cameras, or is a virtual environment. For example, Mahaley is developing a VR sequence, recorded in India, that allows people to experience the uniqueness of the country without having to travel there.

However, we can imagine a time in the not-too-distant future where people don headsets and are instantly transported to the other side of the world in real-time. This would allow them to experience new situations or

collaborate with others in a much richer environment than is available today, without having to get on a plane.

Mahaley says that, while VR is a uniquely engaging technology, this in itself only takes you so far. To use VR and similar technologies effectively for learning requires a three-stage process.

- Engaging people in the content.
- Exploring the content deeply with expert guidance to help extract the key learning points.
- Embedding the practice.

We are also seeing the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) technology that allows learners to interact with and learn from robots. For example, the US Navy has built an AI tool that enables junior officers to practise their team leadership and communication skills with a virtual human.



## 2.7

### CONCLUSION

The market for learning is changing, with a proliferation of new technologies, applications and different ways of bringing learning close to the end user. The trend towards delivering learning through technology is inexorable, and this is shifting learning delivery away from traditional classroom settings. However, we must resist being swept along on a wave of technology for its own sake. It's vitally important to put the needs of the learner at the heart of what we do, to be clear about the objectives we're trying to achieve, and to design solutions that are consistent with the way we know that adults learn (see chapter 5). The 'classroom' can still be a highly effective setting for learning, particularly where learning is enhanced by discussion, interaction and dedicating time for practice. However, interventions have to be high quality and it has to be the appropriate medium for the topic that's being learned. Michael Chavez said: "Face-to-face learning should be used strategically – for shifting mindsets,

creating and developing new ideas establishing shared points of view, contextualizing tools, building networks, and shaping culture. The classroom is ideal for tackling live business issues: how can we get better at navigating the strategic challenges we face in our business?"

Sometimes, moving away from face-to-face learning can have unintended consequences. For example, one of the companies we interviewed faced a backlash from its graduate population when they realised their development would be delivered virtually – graduates felt this did not live up to the employer value proposition they had been sold. For other organisations, with high-touch cultures or in situations requiring interpersonal sensitivity or lots of feedback and practice, face-to-face can still be best. For strongly relationship-driven cultures such as that at Mars, it's a challenge to replicate in a virtual environment the value people get from meeting each other in the physical world. "We're a face-to-face culture – we love to

get on planes to see each other," said Jane Craig, Global Leadership Development Director. "Social media tools like Yammer that work well with other organisations aren't as successful, and we think that's because they're based on text. We're experimenting with more visual media such as video to see if that works better." Direct Line Group still delivers customer service training face-to-face. Jason Gowlett, Head of HR Operations, said: "We teach people how to connect with customers in a way that best suits their personality, and you can't do that virtually." However, some elements are now delivered online. "The point is not to reduce classroom learning for its own sake, but as a way to get people ready to do their jobs more quickly. If we can reduce the time it takes to get someone from being hired to being competent, that's a benefit for the business and it's better for learners, because they're productive sooner."



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